

THE LEONARD LETTER

A weekly electronic newsletter

Bill Leonard, Member

State Board of Equalization

March 8, 2004

"Against criticism a man can neither protest nor defend himself; he must act in spite of it, and then it will gradually yield to him." --- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

German scientist, poet and novelist

UNDER THE DOME

*****Public Education Failing a Generation *****

One big challenge that public schools in California have is convincing the public that more money will result in better student performance. I do not see what they can point to that is going to make voters believe this. Forty-eight percent of freshman enrolled at CSU last year got out of California high schools without basic English skills and 40% lacked basic math skills -- and these are supposedly the good students. It is true that the high number of limited-English speaking students in California is a great challenge. Still, it is obvious that California public schools need bold change, and before they get more money, the California Teachers Association, and other education advocates, will need to offer evidence of a reform agenda that will dramatically improve student performance.

Lance Izumi and the staff at the Pacific Research Institute in San Francisco released a study last fall, The California Index of Leading Education Indicators, which shows that the performance of our schools is at an intolerable level. According to the report:

- From 1987 to 1995, verbal SAT scores for California public high school students dropped from 421 to 412, while those for parochial school students increased from 432 to 442.
- From 1990 to 1994, the percentage of students taking first-year chemistry in California was the lowest of all states, and only Delaware and Hawaii had a lower percentage of students enrolled in second-level algebra.
- California ranks near the bottom in both math and reading based on National Assessment of Educational Progress test scores, with 59 percent of California students reading below the basic level.
- As many as one-third of California's high school students drop out.
- In inflation-adjusted dollars, per-pupil spending in California was 60 percent higher in 1994-95, than in 1969-70.

*****Jobs Held Hostage*****

The Legislature failed to act on workers' compensation reform by the Governor's March 1st deadline. Assembly Republicans had been counting down the days to the deadline, but with it now in the rearview mirror, they have launched a Jobs Held Hostage campaign. One of the first featured companies is Partytime Ice Company in San Pedro, which has cut its employees' workweeks from 40 hours to 20-25 because of the rise in workers' comp premiums. Such public education efforts will help the Governor's plan to move forward a ballot measure on the matter and may put sufficient pressure on legislators to move more quickly.

*****Taking the Oracle Fall*****

What if you wanted to low-ball the news that your political ally was involved in corruption? Well, if you are Attorney General Bill Lockyer, you announce the indictment of a former Governor Davis staffer on election day, thus guaranteeing that all reporters are too busy with election news to cover the story. The Oracle scandal occurred in 2001. The legislative investigation took place in 2002. Now the fastest the "Justice" Department can bring an indictment is Primary Election Day 2004.

I was a member of the investigating legislative committee. We interviewed Kari Dohn, who is now facing charges of altering evidence. I am convinced she was following orders. Somebody in the Davis Administration told her to do this. Yet our Attorney General finds no other evidence of crime! Why would anyone alter evidence if there is nothing to hide?

By the way, the evidence she is accused of altering relates to the real question that has never been answered: What did Gray Davis know and when did he know it?

*****Data for 2003 Looking Strong*****

The data have been crunched for the first quarter of 2003. Taxable sales in California rose 3.5% during the first quarter last year from the same period. Retail stores posted taxable sales of \$72.1 billion, a 5.5% increase. Last year most people viewed the economy as anemic, at best. Given how things seem better now, I am confident that the revenue side is going to continue to improve.

AROUND THE STATE

*****The Leader Board*****

Congratulations to Assemblymembers Loni Hancock and Tim Leslie for not only winning their primaries with no opposition but for leading the Democrats (Hancock -

82,881) and the Republicans (Leslie - 56,368) with more votes than any other Assembly candidates last Tuesday. The Senate "winners" were Democrat Don Perata at 100,438 and Republican Dick Ackerman at 93,580.

*****Voting Fiasco*****

In the January 20th edition of Leonard Letter I summarized Johns Hopkins University research about electronic voting systems. The professors criticized electronic voting systems for their susceptibility to hackers and their inability to be verified by auditors. Unfortunately, another problem with electronic voting was demonstrated in my hometown of San Bernardino last Tuesday. Voters seemed pleased with ease of the touch-screen voting system, but candidates were less-than-pleased with the time it took to calculate and report results.

The Registrar of Voters staff neglected to follow the advice of Sequoia Voting Systems, which recommended synchronizing the 1,700 voting machines to the main system much earlier than when the Registrar began the process. This alone makes the process more open to ballot fraud. When he finally tried to load everything in one large batch, the system bogged down and could not process everything. Ballot counting did not begin until 12:30am and results were not reported until 5:30am.

Candidates were frustrated to not see results sooner and the delays called into question the integrity of the system, no matter what the county officials say. People are already skeptical about the validity of the electronic systems, the Johns Hopkins researchers documented those doubts by demonstrating the frailties of the system, and a major error on its first use in San Bernardino County only exacerbates the concerns.

MISCELLANY

*****Great Books - Final List*****

Because of my previous series on 100 Words to Know list, I have been asked by many of you to present a recommended list of books to read. I welcome your nominations as well. This week is the final on the curriculum of Thomas Aquinas College of Santa Paula, California. The college's curriculum can be summed up as giving a comprehensive look at the history of the ideas of Western civilization, from Plato to Freud. The college points out that not all of these works are of equal weight. Some are regarded as masterworks, while others serve as sources of opinions that either lead students to the truth, or make truth more evident by opposition to it. The full list can be found at:

<http://www.thomasaquinas.edu/curriculum/>

Senior Year

Seminar – Tolstoy: WAR AND PEACE. Goethe: FAUST. Hegel: PHENOMENOLOGY OF MIND, PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY. Flaubert: THREE TALES. Feuerbach: ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY. J.S. Mill: UTILITARIANISM. Marx: CAPITAL, COMMUNIST MANIFESTO, ECONOMIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL MANUSCRIPTS, GERMAN IDEOLOGY. Melville: BILLY BUDD. Willa Cather: MY ANTONIA. Engels: QUANTITY AND QUALITY, NEGATION OF THE NEGATION. Darwin: ORIGIN OF SPECIES. Nietzsche: BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL, USE AND ABUSE OF HISTORY. Twain: HUCKLEBERRY FINN. Austen, EMMA. Freud: GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOANALYSIS. Jung: ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY. Newman: DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE. Kierkegaard: FEAR AND TREMBLING, PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS. Ibsen: A DOLL'S HOUSE. Dostoyevski: BROTHERS KARAMOZOV. Eliot: ASH WEDNESDAY, JOURNEY OF THE MAGI, THE WASTE LAND. St. Pius X: PASCENDI DOMINICI GREGIS. Leo XIII: AETERNI PATRIS, RERUM NOVARUM. Pius XI: QUADRAGESIMO ANNO. Pius XII: HUMANI GENERIS. Vatican II: LUMEN GENTIUM. Plato: PHAEDRUS. Vico: THE NEW SCIENCE. Tocqueville: DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, THE OLD REGIME AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. Husserl: THE IDEA OF PHENOMENOLOGY. Lincoln and Douglas: DEBATES. Flannery O'Connor: A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND, THE ENDURING CHILL. St. Thomas Aquinas: THE DIVISION OF THE SCIENCES.

Mathematics – Pascal: GENERATION OF CONIC SECTIONS. Taylor: INTEGRAL CALCULUS. Dedekind: ESSAY ON THE THEORY OF NUMBERS. Lobachevski: GEOMETRICAL RESEARCHES ON THE THEORY OF PARALLELS.

Laboratory: Einstein: RELATIVITY: THE SPECIAL AND GENERAL THEORY. Hygens: TREATISE ON LIGHT. Newtons: OPTIKS. Maxwell: A TREATISE ON ELECTRICITY AND MAGNETISM. Gilbert: DE MAGNETE. Ampere: PAPERS. Various authors: MECHANICS, WAVES, and OPTICS MANUAL. ELECTRICITY AND MAGNETISM MANUAL.

Philosophy -- Aristotle: PHYSICS, METAPHYSICS. St. Thomas Aquinas: ON BEING AND ESSENCE.

Theology – St. Thomas Aquinas: SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, ON THE TRINITY, ON THE SACRAMENTS, ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST.

BOE AND LEGISLATIVE DATES

March 31, 2004 --- Cesar Chavez holiday

April 1, 2004 --- Legislature's spring recess begins upon adjournment

April 12, 2004 --- Legislature reconvenes

NOTABLE DATES/ HISTORY

March 8, 1913 --- Internal Revenue Service begins to levy and collect income taxes

March 9, 1864 --- Ulysses S. Grant is appointed commander of Union Army

March 9, 1976 --- First female cadets accepted to West Point Military Academy

March 10, 1876 --- Alexander Graham Bell makes the famous telephone call to his assistant in the next room: "Come here, Mr. Watson, I want you."

March 10, 1969 --- James Earl Ray pleads guilty to assassinating Martin Luther King, Jr.

March 11, 0537 --- Goths lay siege to Rome

March 11, 1941 --- FDR signs Lend-Lease Bill (loaning materiel to Britain to fight Germany)

March 12, 1789 --- U.S. Post Office established

March 14, 1743 --- First American town meeting (Boston's Faneuil Hall)

March 14, 1900 --- U.S. currency goes on gold standard

GENERAL TAX INFORMATION

For answers to your general tax questions, call the Board of Equalization information center. Customer service representatives are available to help you from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Pacific time, Monday through Friday (except state holidays).

Toll-free number: 800-400-7115

TDD service for the hearing impaired

TDD phones: 800-735-2929

Voice phones: 800-735-2922

To reach the Taxpayer Rights Advocate's office, call toll-free 1-888-324-2798.

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